


Diane Nichols Tradd
Assistant City Manager/DPD Director

Craig Thomas
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Eileen M. Donoghue, City Manager 

FROM: Diane N. Tradd, Assistant City Manager/DPD Director

DATE: November 5, 2019

SUBJECT: UPDATE TO MOTION OF 5/7/19 BY COUNCILOR CIRILLO
REQUEST THE CITY MANAGER DIRECT THE PROPER DEPARTMENT TO LOOK INTO OPTIONS
ON HOW TO IMPROVE THE LIGHTING FOR THE ENTIRE LENGTH OF THE RIVERWALK FROM
BOOTT MILLS TO LeLACHEUR PARK

As part of a response to the motion of May 7, 2019, by Councilor Cirillo, the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) led a public walk-through of the Merrimack Riverwalk on July 23, 2019. More than twenty participated in the walk-through, including representatives from the City Manager's Office, Lowell Department of Public Works (DPW), Lowell Historic Board, Lowell Health Department, Lowell Police Department, Lowell Downtown Neighborhood Association, and University of Massachusetts Lowell. In addition, several residents from Renaissance on the River, Boott Mills, and elsewhere in the City attended the walk-through and gave valuable feedback.

DPD scheduled the walk-through in the evening to evaluate lighting levels and general feelings of safety and security on the Riverwalk in night conditions. The walk began at Boott Mills and extended past LeLacheur Park to the end of the Riverwalk near Leitch Hall at University of Massachusetts Lowell. Participants were invited to identify issues and brainstorm solutions, which were recorded via notes, photographs, and maps. The group discussed issues related to lighting, vegetation and brush removal, benches, walking surface, and activation. City staff then developed action plans to address the issues, including both short and long-term solutions. A number of these actions have already been undertaken, and their status is summarized on the following pages.

Lighting

During the walkthrough, all lamps were in good working order. When malfunctioning is noted during walk-through or by the public, the City Electrician's office repairs or replaces lighting and coordinates with UML when appropriate, usually within a week. The group did not express concern about malfunctioning lamps.

However, there was general agreement that light levels needed to be higher and more consistent even with functioning lamps. The group liked the light levels near parking lots, where brighter lights with cooler color temperatures spilled over into the Riverwalk. DPD and DPW plan to identify funding for a long-term project to replace the LED fixtures in the lampposts to match the City's standard color and brightness with a target of 2-3 foot candles, the upper end of the recommended light level for a passive parkway. Specific issues to address as part of this project include dirty lenses on western half of walkway and gaps in lighting behind LeLacheur Park. Finally, DPD and DPW will coordinate with UML regarding additional light needed behind Donahue Hall.



Not enough light – behind River Place Towers



Preferred light level – Near RPT Parking Lot

Lit Bollards

Brighter lamps would not help one critical spot the group identified because of existing lamppost spacing: behind Lawrence Mills in the seating areas. The group discussed a possible long-term project to install lit bollards at key locations to ensure there would be no benches in shadow.



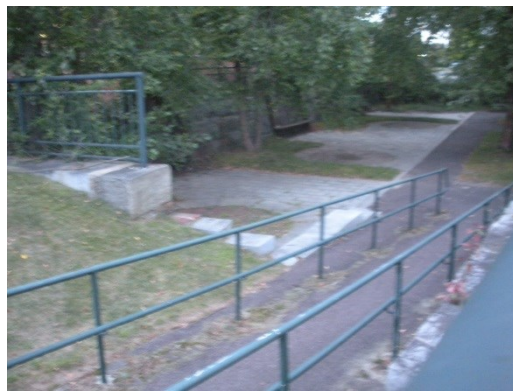
*Area behind Lawrence Mills proposed for future lit bollard project
(Between benches in three areas)*

Decorative Light

Several walk-through participants articulated a desire for decorative light such as string lights or colored lights. Although it might be infeasible to have an installation along the entire length of the Riverwalk, key nodes such as the amphitheater or sunken area behind Tsongas Center may be feasible. The City will evaluate the durability, historic impact, and cost of this type of installation. Lighting along the railing, which would be a longer-term installation, will also be evaluated.



Possible locations for nodes with decorative light or other enhancements



Nodes behind Boott Mills/River Place Towers (left) and Tsongas Center (right)

Vegetation

The group identified many areas for vegetation removal. The Streets Division of DPW has been assigned and is working to prune the area before winter. This includes but is not limited to pruning and removing dead trees and invasive species in the following areas:

- Behind Boott Mills: Needs pruning of vegetation overhead, encroaching, and impacting walls
- Behind River Place Tower: Needs a check for invasive species and possible pruning
- 174 River Place: Needs removal of low vegetation and cleanup (on boundary between land owned by City and University of Massachusetts Lowell)
- Behind Lawrence Mills: Needs pruning of vegetation overhead/blocking light

In addition, DPD and DPW will coordinate with UML to address:

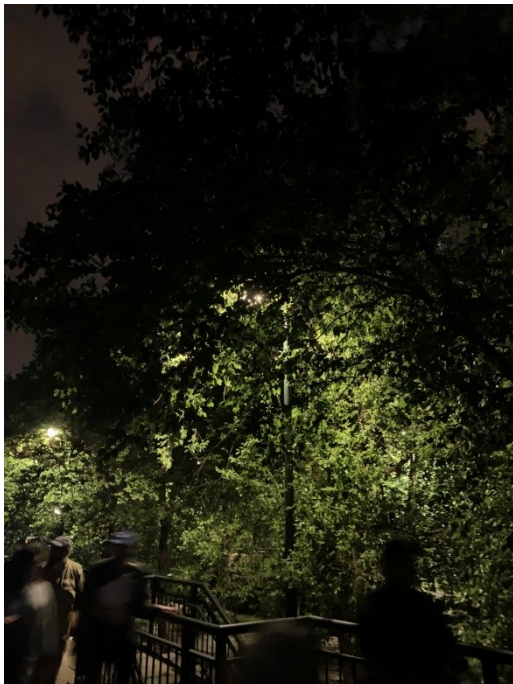
- Behind LeLacheur toward Donahue Hall: Needs pruning of encroaching vegetation and dead tree
- 9/11 Memorial: Needs pruning of encroaching vegetation



Behind Boott



Behind Boott/River Place Towers



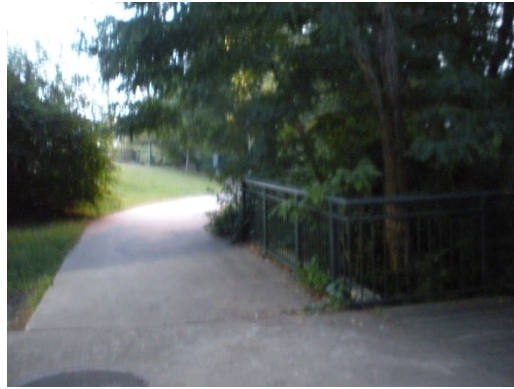
Behind Tsongas Center



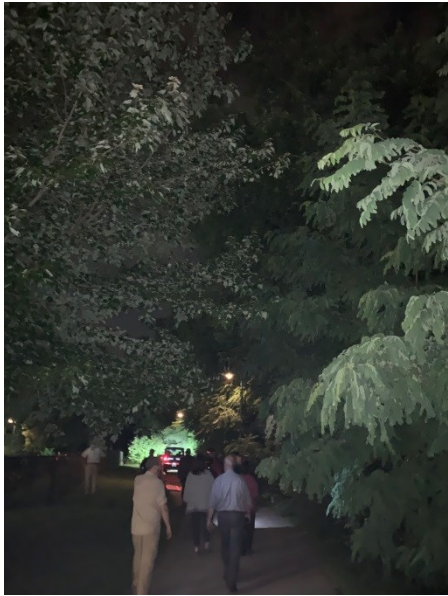
174 River Place (Shrubs block area from view)



Behind LeLacheur Park



Toward UMass Lowell



Behind UMass Lowell (Coordination with UMass Lowell needed)

Brush Removal

The public also identified areas where brush was piled that needs to be removed: both wasteways (Western and Eastern) that spill into the Merrimack River. DPD is currently identifying the party that is responsible for brush removal within the wasteways.



Brush left in spillway

Benches

The group identified benches along the Riverwalk that required repainting and repairing, including the installation of missing slats. These slats may be expensive, so an overall feasibility study may be undertaken for long-term maintenance. The City will also investigate alternative materials for slats such as plastic wood that would retain the overall character but have longer durability. This also should include making sure barrels are bolted down and in good condition.

In the meantime, a repair project was undertaken by the Parks Division of DPW in September to replace missing slats, and all benches were confirmed to no longer have missing slats.



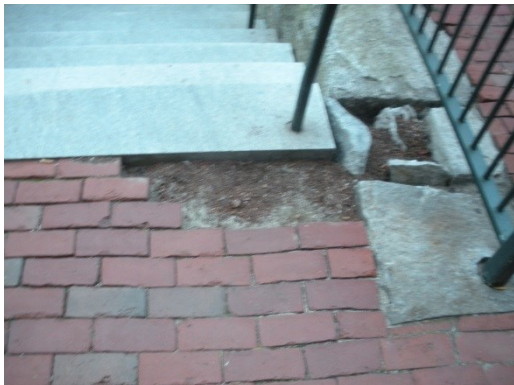
Benches and trash cans along Riverwalk

Walking Surface

The most critical issues related to walking surface were identified on the wooden cantilever and bridge sections, where broken boards were creating holes in the walkway. In the late summer, the Department of Public Works completed repairs and replaced the broken boards that were identified.

Other areas require concrete patching or brickwork, including behind Boott Mills and behind Donahue Hall. The Lands and Buildings Division has been assigned to repair the brick and concrete work, which is anticipated to be completed before winter.

The group also identified a medium-term project to review and adjust any potential trip hazards that don't allow for smooth transitions and access to seating areas. This review is planned to take place in early 2020.



Entry behind Boott Mills



Spalling behind Boott Mills



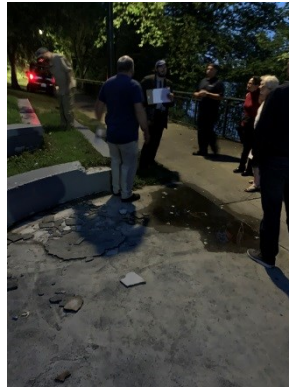
Plywood covering hole in observation deck, which has since been repaired



Cantilever deck and bridge has worn/warped boards



Cracks behind Lawrence Mills need patch



Concrete repair needed near amphitheater

Activation and Interpretation

The group agreed that the area needs to be further activated to attract more use and feelings of safety. This could include active programming, such as an ice cream truck or other vendor in the node behind Tsongas Center or in another key area along the Riverwalk. It may also include passive art or interpretation. Areas of additional exploration include:

- A sign explaining the massing of trees and granite runners in ground which suggests the massing of the previous mill behind the Tsongas Center.
- Gateway and wayfinding signage or art
- Wildflower mix to replace dead shrubs in planting beds at locations such as near Aiken Street beside LeLacheur Park and behind the children play area of LeLacheur Park
- More regular walk-throughs
- A rotation of art panels hung on back of LeLacheur Park 's retaining wall to deter graffiti
- Colored lights in dark stretches (The Town of Merritt was given as an example)
- Clearing of vegetation debris from behind LeLacheur Park

DPD will work with the Cultural Affairs and Special Events office and community partners to identify planned programming for the Riverwalk and discuss possibilities to fill gaps in programming, including possible funding for art projects along the Riverwalk to further activate the space in summer 2020.

Trash

No trash was noted on the walk-through besides the vegetation debris and discarded brush noted in previous sections. On the walk-through, DPW reported that trash is regularly picked up when trash barrels are emptied. Some group members expressed concern that barrels were not emptied regularly enough. On three concurrent site visits, DPD staff noted no trash on the walkway and an appropriate level of trash in the barrels. DPD and DPW will continue to monitor trash levels.

DNT/ns

cc: Chris Hayes, Neighborhood Planner